

February 4, 2009

Dear Senator Laible and Education Committee Members,

Thank you for your time today. With the current state of our economy it is an especially challenging time. We all appreciate your commitment to the future of our children and our state through your efforts on the education committee.

As the parent of two children in the Bozeman Elementary School system I am here to ask for your support of Senate Bills 69 and 70. These two bills are needed if we are to try and maintain the quality of education in our public schools.

I spend a lot of time in the classrooms and the school. We have amazing teachers and administrators who are very dedicated to the success of their students. They do all they can with the resources they have available to them, and that means running a very lean ship. In Bozeman we have forty six classrooms that are already over state caps, and any further reduction in budgets would result in a loss of more staff and additional increases in class sizes. If this happens the quality of education would be greatly diminished.

Teachers can only teach effectively to a certain number of students. That is why we have state caps. When we exceed those numbers some group of students gets neglected. The children who need a little extra help with reading or math may not get it and fall further behind. As they fall behind they begin to feel they are not smart enough and turn away from school. I see this in a young boy in my daughter's third grade class who would hit himself in the head, or hit his desk every time he got a math problem wrong. He felt he was stupid, and he isn't. He has received some extra tutoring, is making progress in math and his self esteem is improving.

Also the gifted and talented children won't be challenged (which can create behavioral problems), and the average children may not get the daily focus they need for continued progress.

When it comes to reading and math I have often heard the old phrase 'it all evens out by the time they are in second grade'. It's been proven that it doesn't all 'even out'. Children don't all learn the same way or at the same rate. If they don't get the attention they need at an early age they continue to struggle. That attention is usually from a teacher, resource room teacher, speech pathologist or aide. If we reduce these positions we reduce the chance of success for all students.

The world is not the same place it was when we were children. There are much higher expectations placed on our children academically and socially. Competition for entrance into colleges and universities is fierce, and applicants

not only need excellent grades in English, math and the sciences, but they must have a strong base in foreign language, the arts and community service. Should we expect that all of our children will attend college? No, but the children of Montana deserve an education that will prepare them to follow their dreams- whether that takes them to MSU, Stanford, or the running the family ranch. Please help give them that opportunity.

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